



PROJECT MUSE®

Li Zhi, Confucianism, and the Virtue of Desire

Lee, Pauline C.

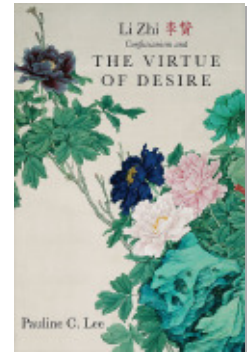
Published by State University of New York Press

Lee, C..

Li Zhi, Confucianism, and the Virtue of Desire.

Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012.

Project MUSE., <https://muse.jhu.edu/>.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/14796>

CHAPTER THREE

The Heart-Mind (心)

Reading “On the Child-like Heart-Mind”

In the concluding remarks to his preface to the Western Chamber, the Farmer of the Dragon Ravine stated, “Those who understand me shall not say I still possess the child-like heart-mind (tong xin 童心).”

—Introduction to Li Zhi’s “On the Child-like Heart-Mind”

Oh! Where can I find a genuine great sage who has not lost his child-like heart-mind and have a word with him about culture?

—Conclusion to “On the Child-like Heart-Mind”¹

I. INTRODUCTION

Upon reading the title of Li Zhi’s famous essay “On the Child-like Heart-Mind,”² surely any literatus in his time would immediately have recalled earlier references to the term of art at the heart of Li’s philosophy.³ Its *locus classicus* is the canonical historical text the *Commentary of Zuo* (*Zuo zhuan* 左傳).⁴ Commenting on year 31 of the reign of the Duke of Xian, the narrator laments about the then 19-year-old⁵ Zhao who would later take the throne after Xian: “He still had a child-like heart-mind, and from this the gentleman knew he would not come to a good end.”⁶ In this early source, the term *tong xin* is used in a derogatory sense; one who possesses a child-like heart-mind is naïve, immature, and inexperienced in the ways of the world. As a result, such a person is bound to come to a bad end.

In the first words and line of Li’s essay the reader is led to yet another—though distinctly less obvious and certainly non-canonical—reference to the term. Li chooses a different kind of literary source:

fiction rather than history and romance rather than politics, and quotes from one of countless commentaries on the 13th century play the *Western Chamber* (*Xixiangji* 西廂記).⁷ Widely performed and read in Li's time, the play celebrates the powerful passion and true love between a brilliant scholar and a beautiful maiden. The story begins as the two fall in love and consummate their illicit passion, unfolds as they overcome traditional barriers to their great romance, and concludes as at last the two joyfully join in marriage. This storybook version of the lovers' union finds its original telling in the Tang period with a markedly different ending in a way demanding to be read as a cautionary—rather than celebratory—tale, entitled *Yingying's Story* (*Yingying zhuan* 鶯鶯傳).⁸ In this telling, freely acting upon one's spontaneous passions and desires leads to grief and tragedy. The brilliant scholar falls with mad desire for the heroine, she no less so for him; and for a brief moment in time they blissfully delight in each other's arms. But later he chooses to turn away from this deep love, desire, and passion, and thereby abandons her. Both later marry: presumably in neither case for passionate ardor or true love.

In carefully choosing and explicitly referring to the *Western Chamber*, we can all but assume Li was deeply aware that upon reading the first lines of "On the Child-like Heart-Mind" the attentive reader would at once consider the story in its earlier (cautionary) version. In the first section of this chapter I will show that attending to and examining what is prominently absent in Li's writings is at many points no less critical to understanding Li's argument and his philosophical vision than attention to and analysis of what he explicitly writes, cites, and claims. In the course of his essay Li insistently argues against and jettisons what in the end the scholar in *Yingying's Story* chooses to live out: rigid, pedantic, homogenized thinking with its symbol that of the stifling and unimaginative scholar of the—however unfairly attributed—Zhu Xi school of Confucian thought. Instead, Li gestures towards, celebrates, and argues for ideals pursued and cherished in the *Western Chamber*: spontaneity, genuineness, abundance in feeling, and passionate desire.

Li Zhi quotes not from the *Western Chamber* itself, but from a commentary and amongst them, Li chooses a 1582 edition. The commentator is anonymous—identified in his work only as "The Farmer of the Dragon Ravine"—and concludes his preface with an explicit reference to the "child-like heart-mind":

Having leisure in my humble home, I casually punctuate the *Western Chamber*. . . . Alone, I hold the text and chant its verses on windy and rainy days or beautiful moonlit nights. I while away the time, and break the strains of poverty and sadness. *Those who understand me shall not say that I still possess the child-like heart-mind.*⁹

We are introduced to a weary scholar, lonely, sad, and while doubtful this is the case, in his words, he is impoverished. With leisure on his hands, he reads and comments upon this most celebrated of love stories and concludes with a longing lament for a child-like heart-mind he no longer possesses.

Now, if we turn to the final lines of our essay at hand, we find neither *scorn*, as in the *Commentary of Zuo*, nor *lament* over what might be, as in the commentary on the *Western Chamber* but rather, joyful *celebration*; Li Zhi seeks for and delights in the words and company of those who cherish, attentively nurture, and hold onto their child-like heart-mind.

And so, the Six Classics, the *Analects*, and the *Mengzi* have become nothing more than crib sheets for those belonging to the School of Principle, a fountainhead for phonies. Certainly these texts cannot shed light on matters by speaking directly from the child-like heart-mind. Oh! Where can I find a genuine great sage who has not lost his child-like heart-mind and have a word with him about culture?¹⁰

The concluding line is a play on a sentence from the writings of the early Daoist Zhuangzi (ca. 369–ca. 286 BCE), and one that no reader in Li's time would miss.¹¹ Li Zhi is a remarkably skilled writer, and we see in this essay that, among what he achieves through the course of the piece, he leads us through a tangle of texts and allusions and adroitly guides us through this rich written world while reformulating, claiming, and staking for his purposes the concept of the child-like heart-mind. Li is a writer who takes the literary world absolutely seriously and works with exquisite wit, erudition, and painstaking attention to the finest of nuances within this medium to write and rewrite a vision for a life well lived.

As we have already seen with Li's reference to a commentary on the *Western Chamber*, attention to terms of art, allusions, and texts that Li Zhi all but explicitly leaves out are *critical* to understanding his views. In analyzing Li Zhi's concept of the child-like heart-mind—a metaphor most central to illuminating his philosophical ideas—I begin by pointing to and briefly describing the relevant ideas behind a select number of key terms of art that one can assume he had in mind and thoughtfully and self-consciously chose to forego: “the original heart-mind” (*ben xin* 本心),¹² the “genuine heart-mind” (*zhen xin* 真心),¹³ “pure-knowing” (*liang zhi* 良知),¹⁴ and “the infant heart-mind” (*chizi zhi xin* 赤子之心).¹⁵ In “On the Child-like Heart-Mind” Li Zhi himself refers only once to the first two terms and never uses either of the latter two, both common Confucian terms in wide circulation among literati in late-Ming China. Nevertheless, analysis of these terms is critical to understanding his philosophy.

Li's concept of the heart-mind has received significant scholarly attention, much of which has sought to discern and illuminate a consistent system of thought in Li's work.¹⁶ Such an approach has led a number of scholars to conclude that Li's writings on the subject are, while innovative, muddled and inconsistent in the end.¹⁷ Others have interpreted Li's apparently contradictory assertions regarding the heart-mind as presenting an ethics of relativism where anything goes.¹⁸ Still others have approached Li's writing in a highly selective manner, focused on those selections and passages that logically cohere, and on this basis have argued that he is a Mengzian¹⁹ or a proto-Marxist,²⁰ for example. Such studies offer thoughtful analyses of Li's writings based on broadly learned scholarship, and yet too often they conclude that the main value of Li's work is the help it can provide as a means to better understand his age²¹ or the inspiration that it provided other more careful, systematic, and substantial thinkers.²² Now certainly Li's writings *are* valuable in pursuing either of these worthy goals; he helps us to gain insight into his times, and he does inspire the development of later schools of thought and social-political movements.²³ But such interpretations—indeed deeply illuminating of other important aspects of Li's writings—all seriously underestimate or wholly overlook the intrinsic value and power of Li's philosophical vision.

As we have seen, Li concludes the last lines of his "On the Child-like Heart-Mind" with a play on the *Zhuangzi*. Much revealing scholarship has been devoted to understanding Zhuangzi's method and possible motivations for writing,²⁴ and those very same explanations help shed light on Li Zhi's approach. Like the *Zhuangzi*, Li's writings present ever-shifting perspectives often in bewildering contradiction with each other. He writes in multiple genres and in a variety of tones. Like the *Zhuangzi*, Li's writings push and prod, gesture toward new horizons, shift us away from our conventional ways of viewing the world, and nudge us into loosening our ever-tightening grip on narrow, stifling, and enervating views of living life. Much of the scholarship that underestimates or neglects the intrinsic philosophical power of Li's writings reads his works as discursive texts with logical arguments and a formal system of thought to be systematically analyzed and unraveled. But as we already can foresee, if indeed Li's style of writing is in ways similar to Zhuangzi's, Li's do not lend themselves well in any way and at all to such an approach and here, I take a different tack and instead, identify, describe, and analyze a cluster of pronounced images found in Li's writings and show how these come together to present a clear, consistent, and powerful picture.²⁵

I will argue through this chapter that Li's conception of the mind is philosophically coherent, rich, and compelling and shall do this both through an analysis of the pronounced places of *silence* or relative silence

in Li's writings—most specifically, the historical terms for the heart-mind that were so readily available to him that we can assume he self-consciously chose to forego—and through a study of the words, images, and rich and substantive *metaphors* and *images* that Li chooses and fills out to explain his concept of the heart-mind and his philosophical view at large. The most comprehensive and representative treatment of Li's child-like heart-mind is found in his “On the Child-like Heart-Mind,” and I turn back to an analysis of this essay.

II. SPEAKING WITHOUT WORDS

A. FORGOING TERMS OF ART: THE “ORIGINAL HEART-MIND” (*BEN XIN* 本心)

In the paragraph that follows immediately after the quote from the Farmer of the Dragon Ravine, Li writes:

The child-like heart-mind is the genuine heart-mind (*zhen xin* 真心). If one denies the child-like heart-mind, then he denies the genuine heart-mind. The child-like heart-mind is free of all falsehood (*jia* 假) and entirely “genuine” (*zhen* 真); it is the “original heart-mind” (*ben xin* 本心) at the very beginning of the first thought. To lose the child-like heart-mind is to lose the genuine heart-mind. To lose the genuine heart-mind is to lose the genuine self. A person who is not genuine will never regain that with which he began.²⁶

As we have seen, in the first lines of his essay Li claims the term of art most central to his essay and philosophy at large—the “child-like heart-mind”—and now he points the reader to two other terms of art: *ben xin* 本心 and *zhen xin* 真心. The term *ben xin* finds its *locus classicus* in passage 6A10 of the *Mengzi*. The 4th-century BCE Confucian classic is arguably one of the most influential and interesting writings in the *Ru* tradition. It is difficult to overstate the significance of this classic in Chinese history. In Li Zhi's time, the *Mengzi* was one of the Four Books, which were central to the Civil Service Examinations taken by most every literatus from the 14th through the end of the 19th century.²⁷ Mengzi's view of the mind was an important idea throughout the course of Chinese philosophy and attained a preeminent position among Confucians in the Tang and later periods. Surely *any* student of the work—including any literatus in Li's time and place—would be familiar with this passage that likens the choice between life and righteousness to choosing between fish and the rare delicacy of bear paws. Mengzi concludes that one who chooses with the lower, appetitive parts of the self and foolishly sacrifices

moral integrity in order to preserve his life, however difficult the choice, has lost contact with what is a person's native, most precious, and greatest moral resource, the "original heart-mind." Mengzi concludes, "This is what we refer to as losing one's 'original heart-mind' (*ben xin* 本心)."²⁸ Li uses this and other terms²⁹ that find their original source in the *Mengzi*, but in the end he chooses another term, *tong xin*, as his primary term of art to refer to the pure, innate, moral mind. Given his preference for this distinctive expression, which does *not* occur in the *Mengzi*, it is reasonable to infer that Li self-consciously both identifies with and distinguishes his view of the heart-mind from that of Mengzi. It is critical to review three aspects of Mengzi's conception of the heart-mind, which are relevant and illuminating to our analysis of Li Zhi. We begin with a passage from the *Mengzi* that reveals a number of the core elements of its view.

You must not be like the man from Song. There was a man from Song who pulled at his grain plants because he was worried about their failure to grow. Having done so, he went on his way home, not realizing what he had done. "I am worn out today," said he to his family. "I have been helping the grain to grow." His son rushed out to take a look and there the plants were, all shriveled up. There are few in the world who can resist the urge to help their grain to grow. There are some who leave the plants unattended, thinking that nothing they can do will be of any use. They are the people who do not even bother to weed. There are others who help the plants grow. They are the people who pull at them. Not only do they fail to help them but they do the plants positive harm.³⁰

Immediately this agricultural metaphor, one among countless within the classic, points us to a central thesis in the *Mengzi*: our moral intuitions are our greatest moral resource, but they are no more than mere and fragile *sprouts* (*duan* 端) or sensibilities³¹ of virtue requiring *development*³² and cultivation. This metaphor also reveals to us a second aspect relevant to our analysis of Li. Mengzi grounds his ethics in what is given by nature, our *human nature*, and in particular the idea that it is profoundly satisfying to connect with these inborn germs of goodness and to nurture and develop them. This reveals the proper course of development for our native sprouts, just as the proper course of development for the Farmer of Song's tender sprouts is to develop into full grown and robust plants. Mengzi argued that this is a natural organic process that required gradual development. As we shall see, Li is like Mengzi in that he too *grounds* his ethical views in an account of *human nature*. Li, though, does not share Mengzi's distinctive view that the heart-mind at birth is simply a fragile sprout that requires careful nurturing—allowing

neither neglect nor overzealous cultivation—in order to fulfill its intended course of development. Mengzi's *development* model, as we will later see, differs in important respects from Li's model of the heart-mind, which I refer to as a *preservation* model of the heart-mind.

Another significant difference between the views of Li Zhi and Mengzi concerns the particular *content* of the heart-mind. Mengzi describes four sprouts of virtue, specifically of compassion, shame, courtesy and modesty, and right and wrong. He believes in a specific path of moral development and in a well-defined and relatively *narrow* conception of the life well lived. One simple example will suffice for our purposes, a story from *Mengzi* 3A5 regarding filial piety. In this passage, Mengzi describes a son's reaction to the death of his parents and asserts that a virtuous son will act in a particular way, one that is the natural development of nascent inclinations common to all healthy humans. Mengzi writes:

Presumably there must have been cases in ancient times of people not burying their parents. When the parents died, they were thrown in the gullies. Then one day the sons passed the place and there lay the bodies, eaten by foxes and sucked by flies. A sweat broke out on their brows, and they could not bear to look. The sweating was not put on for others to see. It was an outward expression of their innermost heart. They went home for baskets and spades. If it was truly right for them to bury the remains of their parents, then it must also be right for all dutiful sons and benevolent men to do likewise.³³

This passage shows that Mengzi believes healthy humans have in common a particular set of inclinations that when properly cultivated, develop into specific ethical dispositions that in turn engender particular kinds of actions.³⁴ As we shall see, Li Zhi had a much broader and looser conception of what the genuine heart-mind might lead a cultivated individual to do. He also thought that the heart-mind could be developed through a variety of means and in particular that a much wider range of texts and practices could help one realize one's genuine nature and act in accordance with the moral heart-mind.

B. FORGOING TERMS OF ART:
THE "GENUINE HEART-MIND" (ZHEN XIN 真心)

Li Zhi found inspiration from a wide range of texts: the early pre-Qin Daoist text the *Daodejing* for which he provides a commentary,³⁵ the great Ming novel the *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳) for which Li is attributed with one of the most influential commentaries,³⁶ and

Confucian works such as the *Mengzi*³⁷ and the *Analects*.³⁸ We know Li immersed himself in certain Buddhist texts; repeatedly in biographical accounts we find mentioned Li's admiration for the *Diamond Sutra* (*Jingang jing* 金剛經).³⁹ And we can all but assume that any literatus of late-Ming China who was deeply interested in Buddhist ideas would also be intimately familiar with a Buddhist sutra widely circulated and received during this time and most relevant to our discussion here, the *Platform Sutra*.⁴⁰ In the classic, we find one of the most well-known and influential examples of the term *zhen xin*.⁴¹ Early on the central figure in the sutra, the illiterate woodcutter who would become Chan Buddhism's Sixth Patriarch, Huineng, preaches:

The deep concentration of oneness is the "genuine heart-mind" (*zhen xin* 真心) at all times, walking, staying, sitting, and lying. . . . Only practicing the genuine heart-mind, and in all things having no attachments whatsoever, is called the deep concentration of oneness. The deluded man clings to the characteristics of things, adheres to the deep concentration of oneness, thinks that practicing the genuine heart-mind is sitting without moving and casting aside delusions without letting things arise in the heart-mind. . . . This kind of practice is the same as insentientcy and the cause of an obstruction to the Dao. The Dao must be something that circulates freely; why should he impede it? If the heart-mind does not abide in things the Dao circulates freely; if the heart-mind abides in things, it becomes entangled.⁴²

For the limited purpose of aiding in our discussion of Li Zhi, I want simply to note two respects in which Li's conception of the heart-mind is meaningfully similar to the concept of the genuine heart-mind found in the *Platform Sutra*. The first similarity concerns *ease*. The genuine heart-mind properly functioning is the heart-mind in simple and natural motion—walking, staying, sitting, and lying. In contrast, deluded practice is the sort that "clings," "adheres," "obstructs," and "entangles." The ease and naturalness of living true to one's genuine heart-mind is in relevant ways similar to Mengzi's description of self-cultivation. For Mengzi, too, cultivation of one's innate sprouts requires effort, and attentive and even arduous effort, but when done properly, feels satisfying. The *methods* of self-cultivation in the *Platform Sutra*, in the *Mengzi*, and in Li's work share the quality of natural ease, which brings joy throughout the process of cultivation.⁴³

Such ease and naturalness in self-cultivation can helpfully be contrasted with the theory of self-cultivation found in the writings of the early Confucian, or *Ru*, thinker Xunzi (ca. 310–220 BCE). Xunzi's vision of

self-cultivation requires controlling and reforming nature rather than, for example, nurturing the natural growth of one's nascent sprouts. Xunzi's focus on reformation can be seen in his use of metaphors that describe self-cultivation as going against the natural bent of human nature. He writes:

A warped piece of wood must wait until it has been laid against the straightening board, steamed, and forced into shape before it can become straight; a piece of blunt metal must wait until it has been whetted on a grindstone before it can become sharp.⁴⁴

Throughout his work, Xunzi uses metaphors of artisanship and conveys the sense that self-cultivation does not consist of following nature but rather, re-shaping natural impulses. Our moral task is to internalize rituals and learning that function as dikes, pipes, and reservoirs for forming anew our feelings in a way that best allows us to satisfy our needs. Xunzi offers what Ivanhoe refers to as a *reformation* model of self-cultivation.

A second aspect of the genuine heart-mind found in the *Platform Sutra* that can aid us in understanding Li's conception of the child-like heart-mind also concerns the method of self-cultivation. In the *Platform Sutra*, we find what we can helpfully refer to as a *discovery* model of the heart-mind in contrast to Mengzi's of *development*. We find another example of a discovery model of the heart-mind in Wang Yangming's conception of the heart-mind as "pure knowing," the human heart-mind in its aware and active mode. Let us describe the discovery model by turning to Wang's views.

C. FORGOING TERMS OF ART:
"PURE KNOWING" (LIANG ZHI 良知)

Three points regarding Wang's concept of the heart-mind are relevant to our understanding of Li: (1) Wang's *method* of self-cultivation as one of discovery, (2) his idea that the heart-mind is directly manifested in a *faculty* of "pure knowing," which results in a strongly context-dependent ethics, and (3) the way in which Wang *grounds* his ethical philosophy in a comprehensive, speculative metaphysical scheme.⁴⁵ Li's concept of the heart-mind is similar to Wang's in respect to the first two points I shall examine but differs from Wang's view in the last. Wang is arguably the most significant Confucian thinker of the Ming period (1368–1644), Li openly acknowledged his debt to and admiration of Wang and his philosophy, and Li is commonly identified as a member of the Taizhou School,⁴⁶ as we noted earlier, the most free-spirited branch of the Wang Yangming school of Confucianism.

Wang believes people are immoral because their genuine self, more specifically their genuine heart-minds, are obscured by selfish desires. Wang commonly uses metaphors such as the sun obscured by clouds, or the mirror by dust to describe the heart-mind in this deluded state:⁴⁷ “The heart-mind of the sage is like a clear mirror. . . . The only fear is that the mirror is not clear, not that it is incapable of reflecting a thing as it comes.”⁴⁸ And again, “The sage’s mind is like a clear mirror, whereas the mind of an ordinary person is like a dull mirror. . . . The effort is to be directed toward the active role of polishing.”⁴⁹ In analogizing the heart-mind to the sun, Wang praises the insight of a student who responds, “One’s innate knowledge can only be obscured by material desires. It is within him and can never be lost. Similarly, clouds may of course obscure the sun but the sun is never lost.”⁵⁰

Wang borrows the term “pure knowing” (*liangzhi*) from Mengzi⁵¹ but transforms its meaning. For Wang pure knowing is an innate, perfect, and fully formed moral faculty, which is always aware and always capable of motivating action. While all are born with the same quality of pure knowing, individuals are born with varying qualities of “psycho-physical stuff” (*qi* 氣). Those who attain moral enlightenment relatively easily are endowed with clearer *qi* than those who must struggle long and hard in the process. The aim of self-cultivation is not to rid oneself of *qi*—which is not possible for any actually existing creature or thing—but to clarify and thus *discover* one’s natural endowment of muddied *qi*. In humans, muddied *qi* manifests itself as selfishness which leads one to act in ways that further disturb, agitate, and roil one’s *qi*, resulting in further murkiness and obscuration. It is by exercising one’s pure knowing in the proper way—remaining vigilant and reflecting on one’s reactions to the actions, events, and situations in everyday life—that one’s *qi* can be clarified. The project of clarifying one’s *qi* is not unlike the way in which the sun burns away clouds that obscure it. If one does not exercise one’s pure knowing, it is because of the torpor and delusion that result when one’s *qi* is cloudy due to the presence of selfish thoughts and material desires. The act of getting oneself to exercise one’s pure knowing is an act of willing, where willing is conceived of primarily as a form of attention. One just has to *do* it. The negative regard Wang had for selfish thoughts can be seen vividly in the following passage:

There is no let-up in this work [of self-cultivation]. It is like getting rid of robbers and thieves. There must be the determination to wipe them out thoroughly and completely. Before things happen, each and every selfish desire for sex, wealth, and fame must be discovered. The root of the trouble must be pulled up and thrown away so that it will never sprout again. Only then can we feel fine.

At all times be like a cat trying to catch a rat, with eyes single-mindedly watching and ears single-mindedly listening. As soon as an evil thought begins to arise, overcome it and cast it away. Be as decisive as in cutting a nail or slicing a piece of iron. Do not tolerate it or give it any consideration. Do not harbor it and do not allow it any way out.⁵²

The enlightened sage is one who has vigilantly driven out and keeps at bay the distorting effects of selfish thoughts, and thereby allows his pure knowing, comprised of “principle” (*li* 理), to shine through, guide one, and operate unimpeded.

Wang describes pure knowing as a faculty that enables us to act morally, and he grounds morality in a vision of the unity of all things. Wang writes:

The great man regards Heaven and Earth and the myriad things as one body (*yi ti* 一體). . . . As to those who posit a separation between objects and distinguish between the self and others, they are petty men. That the great man can regard Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things as one body is not because he deliberately wants to do so, but because it is natural to the humane nature of his mind that he do so. Forming one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things is not only the genuine condition of the great man. Even the petty man is no different. Only he makes himself petty.⁵³

Wang’s notion of pure knowing is central to his vision of ethics, and he grounds this ethics in a *metaphysics* that envisions all in the universe as a unified body.

I want to describe one last aspect of Wang’s thought which we will rely upon to illuminate Li’s conception of the heart-mind: Wang’s *context-dependent* conception of ethics. For Wang, the only criterion for right action is that the action spring from the unimpeded operation of one’s pure knowing. Unlike certain other Confucians such as Xunzi 荀子 (ca. 310–220 BCE) or Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200 CE), who argue that the standards for morality and right action can be found in a canonical body of classics, for Wang and generally speaking for those in the Taizhou school who find inspiration in Wang’s ideas, right and wrong are highly context-dependent. This does not mean Wang is a relativist who believes anything goes. He maintains a clear distinction between right and wrong but insists that these always are keyed to particular times, places, and contexts. All humans whose pure knowing operates properly will choose to act in what is morally the same way under the same or relevantly similar conditions, though their actions cannot be codified into rules.

Wang believed the standard for right action exists within and is available to all who sincerely seek for and follow their pure knowing. We see Wang's inward turn and reliance upon the heart-mind in passages such as the following:

The important thing in learning is to acquire it through the exercise of the heart-mind. If words are examined in the heart-mind and found to be wrong, although they have come from the mouth of Kongzi, I dare not accept them as correct. How much less those from people inferior to Kongzi! If words are examined in the heart-mind and found to be correct, although they have come from the mouths of ordinary people, I dare not regard them as wrong.⁵⁴

For Wang, there indeed exist absolute rights and wrongs in the world, and these moral truths can be readily grasped by one's pure knowing. Wang writes, "In the bright mirror's response to things, what is beautiful appears beautiful and what is ugly appears ugly."⁵⁵ With the idea of pure knowing in hand, Wang is able to offer an alternative to the traditional Confucian view that truth resides in classical texts or earlier historical precedents. For Wang, moral truth is entirely context-dependent and pure knowing is the faculty that is able to grasp these radically context-sensitive truths.

D. FORGOING TERMS OF ART:

THE "INFANT HEART-MIND" (*CHIZI ZHI XIN* 赤子之心)

Luo Rufang 羅汝芳⁵⁶ was a contemporary of Li Zhi, also of the Taizhou school, and widely known in his time for both his charismatic public lectures and his concept of the heart-mind as the "infant heart-mind," a term he without doubt knowingly borrowed from the *Mengzi* but substantively transforms in meaning.⁵⁷ Though Li and Luo most likely never met, Li was aware of and informed about Luo's ideas. One reason Luo is of such particular interest to us is terminological: Li's preferred expression for the moral heart-mind, the child-like heart-mind (*tong xin*), is quite similar to yet surely self-consciously distinct from Luo's. Philosophically speaking, several characteristic aspects of Luo's philosophy are important for understanding Li's views: (1) Luo's *method* of self-cultivation, which values the free expression of one's natural desires, (2) his *grounding* of ethics in a comprehensive metaphysical theory, and (3) his views concerning the *content* of the heart-mind, which results in a relatively narrow conception of right and wrong. As we shall see, Li is like Luo in regard to the first aspect but differs from him when it comes to the latter two.

Luo understood himself and his philosophy as responding to the notion that sagehood necessitates the repression of one's spontaneous feelings and thoughts. According to Luo's biography found in Huang Zongxi's *Records of Ming Scholars*, in his youth he set his heart on moral awakening and, to achieve this end, shut himself in a temple and engaged in a prolonged process of meditation. After exerting himself in this manner for some time, not only did he fail to achieve enlightenment, but he also became spiritually sick. In seeking a cure for his self-inflicted malady, he found a teacher who prescribed letting his natural feelings spontaneously emerge and flow wherever they will, rather than trying to control and repress his passions.⁵⁸ Luo followed this advice and soon was restored to health. According to the biography, his philosophy of spontaneity is sparked by this formative experience. Whatever the truth of this story, the picture of a determined adolescent struggling to reign in his passions offers an effective contrast against Luo's ideal of the spontaneous heart-mind of the infant.

As a disciple of the Wang Yangming school, Luo studied Wang's teachings concerning pure knowing and was particularly interested in the notion that this faculty was innate though obstructed at birth. Inspired by Wang, he developed his own vision articulating a view of humans as born with an innate and perfect capacity for morality which, if preserved or if wholly recovered, would naturally enable them to become full moral beings. Luo strongly emphasized the spontaneity and naturalness most characteristic of the actions of an infant. All people are born with this "infant heart-mind"; a sage simply is one who has preserved or re-discovered this heart-mind and allowed it to remain in or come fully back into play.

In arguing for the value of the spontaneous expression of feelings Luo claims, "You must realize that your feelings (*qing* 情) are your human nature."⁵⁹ As such, to remain true to one's nature is to express rather than repress one's feelings. In describing the spontaneous expression of feelings he provides the exemplar of a "good mother caring for her infant. She does not know she does it and yet she does."⁶⁰ Feelings of love and caring readily manifest themselves so long as artificial obstructions, such as false teachings or excessive meditation, are removed. Again, Luo describes the spontaneous expression of feelings when he writes:

What child at birth does not long to suckle at the mother's breast? Or desire to be held by her father? What father or mother is not fond of holding and nourishing his or her child? What brother or sister does not enjoy watching and protecting his or her little brother or sister? Humans possess this goodness, a natural disposition (*liang shan* 良善).⁶¹

Again, these feelings of love and caring arise untutored and are at the heart of a life well lived; they are the source of a profound sense of ease, joy, and fulfillment. In describing his spontaneous response to contemplating the cosmos, the self, and the Dao, Luo repeatedly uses terms such as “joy” (*le* 樂), “pleasure” (*xin xin* 欣欣), and “desire” (*yu* 欲). The sage is one who acts spontaneously and such unimpeded expression of one’s nature results in the most pleasant and deeply satisfying of lives.

Like Wang Yangming, Luo grounds his ethics of spontaneity in a metaphysics that insists at the deepest level that the heart-mind and the myriad things in the universe are “one body” (*yi ti* 一體): “The great person thoroughly understands that all under heaven is one body.”⁶² And also, “When the mind has spent itself, there is no mind and there is nothing that is not the mind. This is nature; this is the heavenly. This one thing is the common thread of it all.”⁶³ We act in the best interest of all things under heaven because we are one with all of Nature.

A third and final element of Luo’s concept of the heart-mind that is relevant to our study of Li Zhi is his relatively narrow and specific conception of the good. Despite his insistence on spontaneity and the free expression of feelings, Luo believes that our best resources for living the good life are conventional virtues exemplified in canonical Confucian texts. For Luo, all those who give themselves over to being guided by the heart-mind of the infant spontaneously act according to (conventional) virtues such as “filial piety” (*xiao* 孝), “love and respect for elder brothers” (*ti* 悌), and “loving kindness” (*ci* 慈).⁶⁴ As a result, he envisions the good life as one lived in accord with a specific and narrow set of virtues that exist as an explicit ethical standard, a *universal criteria*, applicable to all. As we shall see, while Li is similar to Luo in placing great value on spontaneity and the free expression of feelings, Li differs in that he offers a much broader and more accommodating vision of right and wrong.

In the following section of this chapter I will use and expand upon the categories of analysis delineated thus far—a development in contrast to a discovery model of self-cultivation and the mind, the grounding of ethics in *anthropology* as opposed to metaphysics, a context-dependent, *particularist* and uncodifiable view of ethics⁶⁵ in contrast to generalized, universal criteria for right and wrong, the valuing of spontaneity and *desire* over controlling and restraining one’s emotions, and a *broad and accommodating* conception of the good life as opposed to the narrow adherence to traditional norms and values—to illuminate Li’s concept of the child-like heart-mind. I will show that Li’s views are, with exception of the first pair where his view is neither strictly a development nor a discovery model, more like the first member of the pairs I have listed above and less like the second.

III. SPEAKING THROUGH METAPHORS

A. METAPHORS OF REVEALING AND CONCEALING

Not only does Li give shape to his conception of the heart-mind through silence, but he also richly fills out his vision through the skillful use of images and metaphors: the eye, dress, the body in movement or in health and illness, the acts of eating and sleeping. I want to examine two sets of metaphors and here begin with images of revealing and concealing. When Li raises criticisms, he uses the language of accessorizing literature with clever writing techniques, covering with clothes, following and so being hidden within the masses, or concealing and masking through the vices of hypocrisy and deception. In contrast, when speaking of what is good and desirable, Li writes about things that are readily seen or revealed, such as the eye seeing without impediment, or luminous virtue.

According to Li, many of our worst vices are those that obscure, cover, conceal, or mask the metaphorical pearl or jade. Our innate and perfect heart-minds are obscured by selfishness and our moral and spiritual task is to engage and preserve the original, wholly developed, and purely good heart-mind within us all. Li argues vigorously against “deception” (*shi zha* 飾詐),⁶⁶ the merely “decorative” or “embellished” (*hua gong* 畫工),⁶⁷ excessive concern about the judgments of others, which leaves one vulnerable to feelings of “shame” (*chi* 恥).⁶⁸ He condemns those who are obsessed with appearances, who “worry whether or not others think of one as wealthy, powerful, accomplished, and useful.”⁶⁹ One of the core themes of “On the Child-like Heart-Mind” is Li’s condemnation of “phoniness” (*jia* 假), a vice which masks and obscures the genuine. Li writes of this vice:

[I]f one speaks phony words with a phony person, then a phony person will be pleased. If one speaks of phony affairs with a phony person, then a phony person will be pleased. If one discusses phony literature with a phony person, then a phony person will be pleased. When everything is phony, then nowhere will there be anyone who is displeased.⁷⁰

Li believes the content of one’s child-like heart-mind consists of “genuine” (*zhen* 真) “feelings” (*qing* 情) and “desires” (*yu* 欲), and expression of these genuine thoughts and feelings connects one to an abundant and powerful source. But those who are “phony” cannot bear the powerful presence of the genuine and find a seductive but shallow form of comfort in its antithesis: the stifling, enervated, rigid life of phoniness.

Li speaks out against “artifice” (*gong* 工) and whatever else “obstructs” (*zhang* 障) the genuine within us. In the same essay, he describes as virtues the “genuine” (*zhen* 真) and the “spontaneous” (*zi chu* 自出). Li is not a revolutionary but a reformer who works within the Confucian fold and skillfully and arduously strives to reclaim and amend—and at times to reject—traditional Confucian ideals in his effort to articulate and envision an ethics of genuine expression. While rejecting certain traditional Confucian virtues—such as filial piety, loyalty to one’s king, or strict adherence to a particular set of rituals—he also strives to reclaim the Confucian ideal of “genuineness”: it is actions that mask one’s genuine self—deception, artifice, hypocrisy—that most concern Li.⁷¹

The theme of masking or concealing also can be seen in Li’s use of images of dress and clothing. The hypocritical, the deceptive, the artificial are often described as dressed in ornate and layered clothing. In a clever essay poking fun at the self-important literatus, Li Zhi begins his essay “In Praise of Liu Xie”:

There once was a gentleman from the School of Principle who wore dignified platform shoes. . . . He dressed in a generously long sleeved robe with a wide sash. With the obligations of morality as his cap and the principles of human relations as his garments, he picked up paper and ink stick; one, two, he quietly touched his lips to them; three, four, he then said to himself that he was Kongzi’s disciple.⁷²

This gentleman elevates his self by standing atop platform shoes and conceals the genuine under layers of clothing: long sleeves, a wide sash, a cap of morality. Little if anything is spontaneous in his actions and his movements are mechanically choreographed to the demands of an external rhythm beating “one, two,” and “three, four.”

Li embraces and celebrates the clearly seen and openly revealed, as opposed to the masked and concealed, in his choice of metaphors for the heart-mind: “luminous virtue” (*ming de* 明德)⁷³ and as the “perfect all-reflecting Buddha wisdom” (*da yuan jing zhi* 大圓鏡智).⁷⁴ Li writes that the genuine writer puts his feelings to paper when “something in particular strikes the eye.”⁷⁵ This vivid image of eyes that see directly without impediment is repeated in numerous essays. In a playful piece entitled “Commenting on Kongzi’s Image While in the Temple of the Flourishing Buddha” Li criticizes the masses for blindly following elders, teachers, and conventional teachings without thinking for themselves. He writes, “Today, though people all possess eyes, nobody uses them.”⁷⁶

The child-like heart-mind—as described through such images as the eye, luminous virtue, the pearl and jade in their purity—is fully formed and perfectly functioning at birth. For Li, living a good life

involves nothing more or less than discovering and ceaselessly nurturing this birthright. Li's images of revealing and concealing are in many ways similar to Wang Yangming's of the sun obscured by clouds or the mirror by dust; it is a fully formed and perfectly functioning faculty possessed by all. Li Zhi employs various methods—irony, wit, and ridicule—to shake us out of our state of complacency and malaise so that we uncover and put into operation this resource for genuine action. At the same time, the images Li uses to convey his view of the heart-mind and the proper life for human beings are importantly similar to the agricultural metaphors of growth and development we find in the *Mengzi*. Certainly Li insists we *discover* our fully formed heart-mind; but he also requires—and this aspect makes Li similar to Mengzi—that we engage in ceaseless and joyful nurturing and *cultivation* of the child-like heart-mind. While Li's vision in important respects has characteristics in common with both a development and a discovery model of the self, ultimately he envisions and describes a model that is markedly different and one I will refer to as a *preservation* model of self-cultivation.

Li Zhi's conception of the heart-mind is similar to Wang Yangming's in that both believe the capacity is perfectly formed at birth. Wang, though, conceives of the perfectly formed heart-mind as obscured by selfish delusions; through self-cultivation one clears away these polluting desires. In contrast, Li Zhi emphasizes the purity of the child-like heart-mind and the baleful influences of society—particularly moral teachings—upon this innocent, original endowment. Li writes:

How is it that one could suddenly lose one's child-like heart-mind? From the beginning, aural and visual impressions enter in through the ears and eyes. When one allows them to dominate what is within oneself, then the child-like heart-mind is lost. As one grows older, one hears and sees the Principles of the Way [i.e., moral teachings]. When one allows these to dominate what is within oneself, then the child-like heart-mind is lost.⁷⁷

Li insists upon what at first has the *appearance* of a heroic and almost certainly implausible vision: we are born morally fully formed and perfect, that is “free of all falsehood and entirely genuine” at birth. In the remaining portion of this chapter and in the chapters following, I will show that in fact when we examine the details of his philosophy, his vision is not only plausible but compelling, and, as I will suggest in the conclusion, has much to offer to our contemporary ethical discourse. In the following pages, I turn to a mystifying and critical question: If indeed we are born with a fully formed and perfect heart-mind, why in such a case is self-cultivation necessary? To show the plausibility of

Li's vision and to address our question, I study Li's use of metaphors of health and illness.

B. METAPHORS OF HEALTH AND ILLNESS

Li Zhi is certainly not unique or original in using physical illness as a metaphor for moral corruption; we find such images throughout Confucian or at least neo-Confucian literature. To give one example, Wang Yangming uses metaphors of illness, prescription, treatment, therapy, and health throughout his writings. In a well-known story recorded by his brother-in-law, Xu Ai, we are told that Wang said, "Sages and worthies teach the way physicians prescribe medicine: always matching the treatment to the ailment. . . . They have no predetermined course of action."⁷⁸ While the use of illness as a metaphor for moral corruption is common throughout much of the history of Chinese thought, illness is particularly prominent and centrally important in the writings of Li.

Throughout his writings, Li describes the morally and aesthetically misguided as wounded or sick and the path of self-cultivation as consisting of healing, which leads to a return to one's original healthy state. He speaks of the misguided as possessing "chronic diseases" (*gu ji* 痼疾)⁷⁹ and "meditation maladies" (*chan ji* 禪疾)⁸⁰ and as being "blind and deaf" (*meng long* 蒙聾).⁸¹ Assuming a tone of mock self-effacement, Li refers to "the heart of the illness plaguing this wild and stupid man."⁸² He discounts the efficacy of persuasion and describes the injury or harm that often are the only results of such futile activity. He writes, "If I cry out to the point that I lose my voice, then I injure (*sun* 損) my life-energy. If I speak more, then I injure my body."⁸³ In concluding "On the Child-like Heart-Mind," Li speaks of illness and exclaims:

Who knows whether or not these writings really are the words of the sages? Even if these words did come from the sages, they were spoken to address a particular need, much like the case of prescribing a medication for a specific illness. The sages simply attended to specific situations and applied certain methods in order to save this dimwitted disciple or that inexperienced follower. While a particular medicine might cure one particular phony's illness, such prescriptions are difficult to administer to all patients.⁸⁴

Over and over again he uses the language of diseases, maladies, illness, and injury to describe those who are misguided. In the passage cited above and others that are found throughout his writing, not only do the constellation of metaphors involving illness, prescription, treatment, therapy, and health capture Li's views about how people go astray and

how to bring them back to the Dao or Way, but these images also powerfully convey the degree to which such difficulties are person specific and context-dependent.

Li describes the process of self-cultivation in terms of maintaining, healing, or returning to an original state of health, language consistent with the idea of moral torpor as a kind of illness or injury. Li prescribes a healthy regimen of “dressing, eating, and sleeping.” He writes, “In this world, everything simply concerns things that fall into the category of dressing and eating.”⁸⁵ In advising a friend, Li suggests, “if one simply has one night of peaceful sleep, then one will be at ease with oneself.”⁸⁶ These everyday measures—eating, dressing, resting, sleeping—are common and readily available methods for maintaining good health. Li’s prescription is simple and available to anyone. There is no need for, and Li rarely if ever speaks of, physicians or experts. Healing, in Li’s view, is for the most part self-healing and consists primarily of returning to and trusting in oneself. This is perfectly consistent with his general picture in which the child-like heart-mind is ever-present and remains in its original, pure state of spiritual health. We suffer because we allow ourselves to be corrupted by the phoniness of society; our wounds are for the most part self-inflicted. We heal ourselves, naturally and spontaneously, when we recognize the source of this malady and embrace and trust in our original heart-mind. Li writes of “loving myself,”⁸⁷ of “returning” to one’s original state,⁸⁸ of refraining from injuring oneself.⁸⁹ The task at hand is to prevent and heal injury and illness. The method of self-cultivation is one of *preservation* or *maintenance*, and in cases where one has lost contact with the child-like heart-mind, *healing*, rather than *development* or *discovery*, as found in Mengzi and Wang Yang-ming’s philosophy, respectively.

Wang Yangming and Li Zhi both use images of revealing and concealing, but their particular choice of metaphors is importantly different and carries profound implications for their respective philosophies. Wang’s preferred metaphors are ones such as the mirror obscured by dust or the sun by clouds, whereas Li chooses images such as the vices of phoniness and hypocrisy obscuring the child-like heart-mind, clothes covering the genuine person, or literary ornamentation effacing genuine literature. While the common theme of revealing and concealing highlights their shared conception of the heart-mind as fully formed at birth, this should not obscure the important differences that exist between the discovery and preservation models of self-cultivation. For example, Wang’s set of metaphors involves inanimate objects that are obscured or covered over: the mirror or the sun hidden by dust or clouds. For Li, what is hidden or obscured often is an organic entity, for example the heart-mind itself or the human body, which can be healthy

or ill and which grows and changes over time. These qualities of sickness, health, growth, and change are critical for understanding important features of Li's organic concept of the child-like heart-mind.

The language of health enables us to better understand Li's assertion that we are born with a perfectly formed child-like heart-mind, and yet at the very same time we must engage in ceaseless self-cultivation. The generic⁹⁰ child is born healthy and grows over time; what constitutes good health changes as one matures. We are perfectly happy to find an infant babbling and crawling along the floor and consider such behaviors signs of health, but we would be somewhat concerned about adults who behaved in a similar manner. Health is conceived of differently over the course of a lifetime, manifested differently across different groups of people, and while all healthy humans must work to maintain their health, different people require different sorts of regimens in order to succeed at this task. These are further important implications of Li's metaphors concerning illness, prescription, treatment, therapy, and health, and illustrate the richness and power of this related set of images. As noted earlier, his core metaphors succeed in capturing many of the most distinctive features of his views about how people go wrong as well as how they can work their way back to a good life. Preserving the original child-like heart-mind requires daily maintenance. The implications discussed above vividly express Li's context-dependent ethics, and they also show why it is wrong to consider him to be a relativist; while health is manifested differently for different people, in different contexts, and at different points in their lives, in the end, there still exists a shared, albeit flexible, standard. It is not the case that anything goes.

IV. WHY THE CHILD-LIKE HEART-MIND?

In the above pages we have shown how Li so skillfully claims the term the "child-like heart-mind" and forgoes terms of art that were easily and readily available to him. Through such analysis emerges a picture of Li's views on self-cultivation: we are born with a fully formed heart-mind and an ethical life requires us to daily strive to nurture and maintain this birthright. We then proceeded to fill out a description of his preservation model of self-cultivation by examining images and metaphors he uses in his writings. While his conception of the child-like heart-mind is part of a larger metaphysical scheme involving traditional Confucian notions, it is most directly and intimately tied to a distinctive view of human nature. Li conceives of human nature as comprised of fundamental *genuine* feelings which give rise to characteristic desires. These describe a general perspective or stance toward the world that he refers to often times as "self-interestedness" (*si 私*). Ultimately, it is our *true*

interests or *genuine* desires that make us human. The universal drive to satisfy one's genuine desires is, for Li, our fundamental nature and the best resource for creating a good life, not only for ourselves but also for those around us. Li writes:

Human beings necessarily are self-interested, and their heart-minds are comprised of these interests. Without self-interest there is no heart-mind. If a farmer self-interestedly desires to bring in a harvest in the fall, he will exert all his efforts in tilling the fields. If one who governs a household self-interestedly desires to grow wealthy, he will exert all his efforts in managing his estate. If one who pursues learning self-interestedly desires the rewards due to an official, he will exert all his efforts in preparing for the Civil Service Examinations. If a bureaucrat is not given emoluments, even if he is summoned to take an official position he will not accept. If a person is not esteemed with a high rank, then even if he is urged to take the position, he will certainly not respond. Even with a sage such as Kongzi, if he were not given the position of the Minister of Justice and the duty of an acting prime minister, certainly he would not settle down in the state of Lu for even one day. This is the way things naturally are.⁹¹

Li envisions individual humans as infinitely varied creatures each born with distinctive and ever-changing desires: for a life of the mind, a monastic life, power and status, a life of virtue. It does *nearly* seem that Li embraces a life of virtually any form and shape; while in fact he does not believe that anything goes, Li is one of the most distinctive among Confucian thinkers in his passionate appreciation of the grand *variation* of good lives. In one of many letters quarreling with his one-time friend Geng Dingxiang, Li writes:

The variety of people and things in this world are countless. If one wants all these people and things to abide by one's methods, then heaven and earth would not be able to function. . . . Each person pursues what he zealously desires, and each person seeks to pursue what he is good at.⁹²

Li grounds his ethics most directly in *human nature* and the human inclination to satisfy our individual desires; in this regard he breaks from earlier neo-Confucians, such as Wang Yangming, who explicitly appeal to speculative and comprehensive *metaphysical* schemes.⁹³ Li's vision of a good life is broad and loose; at the same time, it is not the case that his ethical vision necessitates or even accommodates the satisfaction of

simply *any* desire: the desires must be what he ceaselessly refers to as “*genuine*” (*zhen* 真). Li is not a proto-Marxist, proto-liberal humanist, proto-capitalist, or a relativist. He is one prominent voice within the late-Ming “cult of *qing*,” and in tune with the ideals in this time and place, Li articulates an ethics of the expression of *genuine* desires.

In his body of work on Confucianism Philip J. Ivanhoe has illuminated the diversity of voices within Confucian thought; one way he has done this is to argue, and in many ways persuasively, that one substantive and often underappreciated difference between early Confucian thinkers such as Mengzi, and neo-Confucians such as Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming concerns the foundations that each provides for ethics.⁹⁴ Put too simply, early Confucians such as Kongzi, Mengzi, and Xunzi ground their ethics in anthropology or, more particularly, theories about *human nature* and moral psychology; Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming develop their ethical views out of comprehensive *metaphysical* schemes. Ivanhoe attributes this move from anthropology to metaphysics in part to the rise of Daoist and Buddhist thought from the 1st through the 9th century CE. While Li’s contemporaries such as Wang Yangming and Luo Rufang do ground their ethics in a grand metaphysical scheme, Li is a Confucian thinker who does *not* fall into this pattern but rather, returns to grounding ethics in *human nature*.⁹⁵ Li ties his ethics to an understanding of our human nature and insists our natural endowments range across a wildly varied spectrum of types. Rather than laud traditional Confucian virtues such as filial piety, benevolence, and ritual propriety, Li speaks in broader and looser terms when describing criteria that identify genuine desires. Furthermore, Li’s ethics cannot clearly be defined using the categories identified by Ivanhoe as one of *development* or *discovery*, but rather, Li borrows from and amends such ethical models and creatively sets forth what I referred to earlier as a *preservation* model of the self.

Li’s model shares important virtues with Mengzi’s developmental vision. Both conceive of our *internal* resources and especially particular instincts—for Mengzi, those he refers to as our “four sprouts,” and for Li, our genuine desires—as our best resource for living a good life. Such a vision can be contrasted against Xunzi’s, who argues that *external* resources—classical texts and teachers—most effectively enable us to reform our natural instincts and are our best resource for living well. By calling on our internal resources, Mengzi’s and Li’s ethical views appeal to our common intuition that the moral life can only be truly sustained when its original source is subjective, internal to ourselves. In Mengzi’s view, we are born with fragile inclinations toward good; we possess within us the most powerful resource for *becoming* the best version of ourselves. With Li Zhi, we *are* born with fully developed virtues lacking nothing; and yet, we must constantly and arduously strive to nurture

and preserve this original birthright. Li's is a deeply appealing and powerful ethical vision committed to a faith in our original complete virtue; we are not on a path to becoming a better version of ourselves, but instead, are born fully virtuous with self-cultivation as involving work analogous to the daily activities of maintaining the self through eating, dressing, resting, or the natural daily inclinations to express oneself through singing, dancing, writing. Such a view of ethical life as nothing more or less than daily maintenance of an innate and fully given capacity may seem naïve to some, but I believe it has much to contribute and is a welcome corrective to our contemporary ethical discourse, a subject which we will turn to in Chapter Five.

To the best of my knowledge, we never find an explicit explanation anywhere in Li's writings for why he chooses the term "child-like heart-mind" (*tong xin*), rather than other readily available terms such as "original heart-mind" (*ben xin*), "genuine heart-mind" (*zhen xin*), or "pure knowing" (*liang zhi*), to describe a pure, untainted heart-mind. Perhaps he thought these more abstract terms could not capture his vision of the good life as a tangible, flesh-and-blood disposition to satisfy ever-changing desires. For such an ideal the term "child-like heart-mind" (*tong xin*) seems most appropriate.⁹⁶ Whatever Li's intentions, attending to the sense of the organic and tangible conveyed by the term *tong xin* aids us in understanding Li's emphasis, in tune with the values of the late-Ming "cult of *qing*," on the corporeal and the human rather than the abstract and metaphysical, on the mercantile language of wants and needs rather than the more abstract moral language of right and wrong, and on the psychology of feelings and desires rather than on metaphysical theories of *li* and *qi*.⁹⁷ In the following chapter, let us further explore Li's turn to human psychology and his conception of human nature as one of seeking and desiring.

This page intentionally left blank.